

ALLEGHENY FURNACE
Union Avenue and Crescent Road
Altoona
Blair County
Pennsylvania

HAER No. PA-318

HAER
PA
7-ALTO,
163-

PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Engineering Record
National Park Service
Department of the Interior
P.O. Box 37127
Washington, D.C. 20013-7127

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HISTORIC AMERICAN ENGINEERING RECORD

ALLEGHENY FURNACE

HAER No. PA-318

Location: Union Avenue and Crescent Road
Altoona, Blair County
Pennsylvania

UTM: 17 E.719740 N.4485420
Quad: Hollidaysburg
Scale: 1:24,000

Date of Construction: 1811

Present Owner: Blair County Historical Society.

Present Use: Historical Society's Exhibit.

Significance: Though constructed in 1811, Allegheny did not prosper until the mid 1830s when Elias Baker assumed its control. The furnace was originally charcoal fired though it was converted to coke in the 1860s. The furnace went out-of-blast in the 1870s.

Historian: Nancy Shedd, 1987.

Project Information: The results of the study of Cambria County were published in 1990: Fitzsimons, Gray, editor, Blair County and Cambria County, Pennsylvania: An Inventory of Historic Engineering and Industrial Sites (Washington, D.C.: America's Industrial Heritage Project (AIHP) and HABS/HAER, National Park Service). The contents of the publication were transmitted to the Library of Congress as individual reports. Research notes, field photos and copies of historic photos collected during the project were transmitted to the AIHP Collection, Special Collections, Stapleton Library, Indiana University of Pennsylvania, Indiana, PA 15705.

History

In 1811 Allegheny Furnace was erected at what is now Union Avenue and Crescent Road in Altoona. Its promoters, Robert Allison and Andrew Henderson of Huntingdon, were entrepreneurs whose primary interests were not iron-making. Probably as a result of the depressed economy following the War of 1812, the furnace went out of blast after operating only seven years. Many Juniata Valley furnaces were similarly distressed during this period. The furnace remained idle until 1835, when Elias Baker and Roland Diller of Lancaster County purchased it. To supervise the iron making operation Baker relocated to the Allegheny Furnace. The newly completed Pennsylvania Canal provided vastly improved transportation and increased manufacturing opportunities. Despite economic difficulties following the Panic of 1837, Baker's iron furnace operation grew in the 1840s. In 1842 Baker owned the Indiana Furnace five-miles east of New Florence, in Indiana County, Pennsylvania, in addition to his Blair County operation.

Further evidence of his highly successful iron business was the construction in of the largest, most ornate ironmaster's house in the region. Begun in 1846 and completed in 1848, the Baker House was designed in the Greek Revival style by architect Robert Cary Long, Jr. The two-story stone residence is situated a top of a hill overlooking the furnace. Its south facade features a two-story portico, with fluted cast-iron columns and large Ionic columns.

After Elias Baker's death in 1854, his son, Sylvester C. Baker, assumed charge of the iron furnace. Sylvester converted the former charcoal-fired furnace to coke in 1867. The furnace was producing 50 to 80 tons of pig iron per week just before its final blow in the 1870s. Although the furnace was abandoned well before the turn of the century, the Baker family continued to live in the large house until 1914. Eight years later the Baker Mansion was acquired by the Blair County Historical Society, which houses its museum and a small archives there.

When the furnace was restored in 1939 the stones of the deteriorated stack were mortared in place, the working arches were closed with stone, and a railing was placed around the stack's top. Stone steps were built up the south side of the stack to give access to a platform built on top. The furnace is maintained by the Women's Club of Altoona, which uses the complex's stone storeroom and office as its headquarters.

The stone furnace stack measures approximately 30' x 30' at its base and is about 15' high, with work arches on the north, south and east sides. The embankment on the west side served as the loading ramp to reach the top of the stack into which the charcoal, ore, and limestone were dumped.

Sources

Simpson J. Africa, History of Huntingdon and Blair Counties, Philadelphia: Louis H. Everts, 1883.

American Iron and Steel Association Bulletin 1856, Philadelphia: American Iron and Steel Association, 1857.

Harold E., Dickson, "The Baker Mansion, Altoona," and Benjamin Landis Graybill, "History of Allegheny Furnace," in Past & Present: A Bulletin for Members and Friends of the Blair County Historical Society, no. 8 (n.p.: Summer 1966)

Myron B. Sharp and William H. Thomas, A Guide to the Old Stone Blast Furnaces in Western Pennsylvania, Pittsburgh: Historical Society of Western Pennsylvania, 1966.